

## Message Text

SECRET

PAGE 01 BANGKO 04760 01 OF 02 021309Z

46

ACTION EA-06

INFO OCT-01 SS-14 ISO-00 NSC-05 NSCE-00 PM-03 SP-02 L-01

INR-05 CIAE-00 PRS-01 USIA-01 ACDA-10 MC-01 IO-03

OMB-01 /054 W

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R 021214Z MAR 76

FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9401

INFO DIA WASHDC

CINCPAC HONOLULU

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 BANGKOK 4760

LIMDIS

CINCPAC ALSO FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: XGDS-3

TAGS: PINT, PGOV, TH

SUBJ: PROSPECTS FOR HOLDING THAI ELECTIONS; POSSIBLE CHANGES  
IN GOVERNMENT

REF: A) BANGKOK 4663 B) BANGKOK DAO 6 895 0116 76 (NOTAL)

SUMMARY: SITUATION IN BANGKOK CONTINUES CALM, BUT THERE ARE UNDERCURRENTS OF UNCERTAINTY WHICH RAISE QUESTIONS AS TO WHETHER ELECTIONS WILL BE HELD APRIL 4 AND WHETHER THERE WILL BE MAJOR CHANGES IN RTG IN NEXT FEW WEEKS. THAI MILITARY MAY BE CONSIDERING ACTION TO TAKE OVER GOVERNMENT, PERHAPS IN ASSOCIATION WITH CIVILIAN ELEMENTS, IN BELIEF THAT ELECTIONS, IF HELD, WILL RESULT IN CONTINUING INSTABILITY, WITH SOME RISK OF LEFTIST GAINS. HOWEVER, THERE IS SO FAR NO RPT NO EVIDENCE THAT THE ELEMENTS NECESSARY FOR SUCH ACTION BY THE MILITARY HAVE BEEN PUT TOGETHER. POSITION OF KING IS PROBABLY CRUCIAL TO ANY ACTION BY MILITARY, AND KING HAS BEEN REPORTED, UP TO NOW, AS OPPOSING MILITARY ACTION. NOT RPT NOT ALL INDICATORS POINT TO ACTION BY MILITARY, AND REF B SETS OUT IN DETAIL

SECRET

SECRET

PAGE 02 BANGKO 04760 01 OF 02 021309Z

FACTORS INHIBITING MILITARY TAKEOVER. MOREOVER, LEFTIST

PARTIES AND STUDENTS WILL ALMOST CERTAINLY OPPOSE MILITARY OR MILITARY/CIVILIAN TAKEOVER, AND WE DOUBT IT COULD BE DONE WITHOUT BLOODSHED. END SUMMARY.

1. AS REPORTED IN REF A, SITUATION IN BANGKOK IS NOW GENERALLY CALM, FOLLOWING FAST-MOVING DEVELOPMENTS OF LAST WEEK (ESPECIALLY MILITARY ALERT) AND MURDER OF SOCIALIST PARTY SECRETARY GENERAL BUNSANONG FEB 28. HOWEVER, THERE ARE CONTINUING UNDERCURRENTS OF UNCERTAINTY WHICH RAISE QUESTIONS AS TO WHETHER ELECTIONS WILL BE HELD APRIL 4 AND WHETHER THERE WILL BE MAJOR CHANGES IN RTG IN NEXT FEW WEEKS.

2. ALTHOUGH MILITARY ALERT FINALLY ENDED FEB 29, TESTING OF ALERT PROCEDURES HAS PROBABLY IMPROVED UNDERSTANDING WITHIN THAI MILITARY ESTABLISHMENT OF WHAT WOULD BE REQUIRED TO LAUNCH ACTION AIMED AT CHANGING GOVERNMENT OR POSTPONING ELECTIONS. MOREOVER, SITUATION IS SUCH THAT THAI MILITARY WILL RETAIN THE CAPABILITY MOR OR LESS INDEFINITELY TO MOUNT AND CARRY OUT SUCH ACTION ON SHORT NOTIIE. UNDER THESE CIRCUMSTANCES, WE ANTICIPATE THAT CONSIDERATION TO MOUNTING SUCH AN OPERATION WILL PROBABLY CONTINUE OVER THE NEXT FEW WEEKS.

3. AS A VARIATION ON TRADITIONAL COUP D'ETAT, IT IS POSSIBLE THAT THAI MILITARY MAY MAKE SOME MOVE, PROBABLY IN ALLIANCE WITH LIKE-MINDED CIVILIANS, BEFORE THE APRIL 4 ELECTIONS. THIS WOULD NOT RPT NOT NECESSARILY INVOLVE SEIZURE OF RADIO STATIONS AND OTHER KEY INSTALLATIONS BY FORCE AND STATIONING OF TANKS AT KEY INTERSECTIONS TO DISCOURAGE COUNTER-ACTION BY GROUPS OPPOSED TO MILITARY ACTION. A MORE LIKELY SCENARIO WOULD BE A QUIET TAKE-OVER WITH THE KING'S BLESSING, WITH THE ARGUMENT USED THAT THE ACTION WAS NECESSARY TO "PROTECT THE NATION". A NEW GOVERNMENT WOULD BE APPOINTED (IT MIGHT WELL CONTAIN A NUMBER OF PRESENT CABIENT MEMBERS), AND ELECTIONS WOULD BE POSTPONED, PROBABLY FOR A FIXED PERIOD WHICH COULD THEN BE EXTENDED. PRIME MINISTER KHUKRIT WOULD HAVE TO BE GIVEN FIRST REFUSAL AS HEAD OF THE GOVERNMENT, BUT HIS COMMENTS TO THE AMBASSADOR ON FEBRUARY 2 INDICATE THAT  
SECRET

SECRET

PAGE 03 BANGKO 04760 01 OF 02 021309Z

HE WOULD REFUSE TO BECOME A FIGUREHEAD. HE STRONGLY REAF-FIRMED THIS POSITION ON TIME CORRESPONDENT YESTERDAY. IF THE POSITION INVOLVED REAL POWER, WE BELIEVE HE MIGHT NONETHELESS ACCEPT. HOWEVER, HE HAS NOTED THAT, IN THE EVENT OF A MORE OR LESS FORCIBLE TAKEOVER OF THE GOVERNMENT BY THE MILITARY, HE WOULD HAVE NO RPT NO POWER, AND HE WOULD NEED TO BE CONVINCED THAT HE WOULD WIND UP AS MORE THAN A FRONT MAN FOR THE MILITARY. ALTHOUGH THE THAI MILITARY MAY BE

CONSIDERING SUCH A MOVE, WE HAVE NO RPT NO INFORMATION TO DATE TO INDICATE THAT SUCH A MOVE IS ACTIVELY BEING PLANNED. DAO FEELS THAT THOUGH SUCH ACTION IS POSSIBLE, IT IS CURRENTLY IMPROBABLE.

4. OUR VIEW THAT THE MILITARY MAY BE CONSIDERING ACTION AIMED AT TAKING OVER THE GOVERNMENT AND POSTPONING THE ELECTIONS RESTS ON THE FOLLOWING FACTORS:

A) MOST OBSERVERS ANTICIPATE THAT ELECTIONS WILL RESULT IN CONTINUED INSTABILITY, WITH 39 PARTIES AND 3265 CANDIDATES CONTESTING FOR 279 SEATS. THE THAI NATION/SOCIAL ACTION ALLIANCE IS NOT RPT NOT WORKING WELL. NO SINGLE PARTY IS LIKELY TO COME CLOSE TO A MAJORITY, AND ANY GOVERNMENT FORMED WILL HAVE TO BE A MULTI-PARTY COALITION.

B) RIGHTLY OR WRONGLY, SOME OBSERVERS (INCLUDING SOME SENIOR OFFICERS IN THE THAI MILITARY) BELIEVE THAT LEFTIST PARTIES, SUCH AS NEW FORCE, ARE GAINING GROUND. THEY SEE GROWING DANGER THAT THE DEMOCRATS AND LEFTISTS MIGHT FORM A GOVERNMENT WHICH WOULD ADVERSELY AFFECT ESTABLISHMENT INTERESTS.

C) DISSATISFACTION OVER THE CURRENT SITUATION AND ELECTION PROSPECTS IS GROWING WITHIN THE ARMY. RTA COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF GE. BUNCHAI DOES NOT WANT TO LOSE THE SUPPORT OF KEY ELEMENTS IN THE ARMY. HE IS PROBABLY UNDER GROWING PRESSURE TO ACT TO STRENGTHEN THE GOVERNMENT, AND THIS PRESSURE MAY WELL HAVE UNDERLAIN HIS ORDERING MILITARY ALERT IN BANGKOK FEB 24-25.

5. NOT RPT NOT ALL OF THE INDICATORS POINT TO EARLY ACTION BY MILITARY OR CIVIL-MILITARY GROUP TO TAKE OVER THE  
SECRET

SECRET

PAGE 04 BANGKO 04760 01 OF 02 021309Z

GOVERNMENT. WE WISH TO DRAW DEPARTMENT'S ATTENTION TO REF B, WHICH SETS OUT IN CONSIDERABLE DETAIL THE BALANCING FORCES AND PRESSURES WITHIN THE THAI ARMED FORCES WHICH WORK TO PREVENT MILITARY ACTION TO TAKE OVER THE GOVERNMENT. KEY TO SITUATION IS CLEARLY THE POSITION OF THE KING. IF THE KING CONTINUES TO OPPOSE MILITARY ACTION TO TAKE OVER THE GOVERNMENT AND TO POSTPONE ELECTIONS, AS HE EVIDENTLY HAS DONE UP TO THIS POINT, PROSPECT FOR MILITARY TAKEOVER AND POSTPONEMENT OF ELECTIONS WILL BE MUCH GREATLY REDUCED.

SECRET

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PAGE 01 BANGKO 04760 02 OF 02 021314Z

46

ACTION EA-06

INFO OCT-01 SS-14 ISO-00 NSC-05 NSCE-00 PM-03 SP-02 L-01

INR-05 CIAE-00 USIA-01 PRS-01 OMB-01 ACDA-10 MC-01

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R 021214Z MAR 76

FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9402

INFO DIA WASHDC

CINCPAC HONOLULU

S E C R E T SECTION 2 OF 2 BANGKOK 4760

LIMDIS

CINCPAC ALSO FOR POLAD

6. THE KING AND QUEEN ARE CURRENTLY IN CHIANG MAI BUT WILL SHORTLY MOVE TO HUA HIN, AS USUAL AT THIS TIME OF YEAR. MOVE WILL PUT THE KING PHYSICALLY CLOSER TO BANGKOK OVER THE NEXT FEW WEEKS, BUT HE HAS VERY GOOD COMMUNICATIONS SYSTEM AVAILABLE TO HIM IN ANY CASE.

7. CONSEQUENCE OF MURDER OF SICALIST PARTY SECRETARY GENERAL BUNSANONG FEB 28 IS HEIGHTENING OF CONCERN BY LEFTIST PARTIES AND STUDENTS THAT MILITARY MAY BE ABOUT TO TAKE ACTION. IN THIS CONNECTION LEFTIST PARTIES AND STUDENTS HAVE SO FAR REACTED WITH CARE TO BUNSANONG MURDER, AVOIDING ANY DIRECT ALLEGATIONS AS TO RESPONSIBILITY AND SO FAR NOT RPT NOT SCHEDULING ANY DEMONSTRATIONS. NONETHELESS, THERE IS ONLY A SLIGHT PROSPECT THAT THE MILITARY (WITH OR WITHOUT AGREEMENT OF CIVILIAN PERSONALITIES) COULD TAKE OVER GOVERNMENT AND POSTPONE ELECTIONS FUETLY. IN FACT, WE ARE CONVINCED THAT STUDENTS AND OTHER GROUPS WILL NOT RPT NOT ACCEPT A RETURN TO MILITARY RULE, NO MATTER HOW ARTFULLY DISGUISED, AND THE ODDS ARE THAT SOME CLASHES IN BANGKOK WILL OCCUR IF A SCENARIO OF THIS KIND IS PUT INTO EFFECT.

SECRET

SECRET

PAGE 02 BANGKO 04760 02 OF 02 021314Z

WE ARE ALSO MINDFUL OF THE LIKELIHOOD THAT SOME ELEMENTS, PARTICULARLY OF THE LEFT, WOULD FIND IT USEFUL TO CONNECT A MILITARY TAKEOVER WITH THE U.S. RESIDUAL FORCE ISSUE AND WOULD CLAIM THAT WE ENCOURAGED OR ORCHESTRATED THE WHOLE AFFAIR TO PRESERVE OUR MILITARY PRESENCE.

8. CONCLUSION OF THE FOREGOING IS THAT, WHILE SOME MILITARY FIGURES MAY BE CONSIDERING ACTION TO TAKE OVER THE GOVERNMENT AND POSTPONE ELECTIONS, THERE IS SO FAR NO RPT NO EVIDENCE THAT ELEMENTS ESSENTIAL TO MOUNTING SUCH AN OPERATION HAVE BEEN PUT TOGETHER. LEFTIST PARTIES AND STUDENTS ARE INCREASINGLY CONCERNED AT THE POSSIBILITY OF A MILITARY TAKEOVER, AND PROSPECTS FOR A QUIET TAKEOVER ARE SLIGHT. FOREGOING IS INHERENTLY AN UNSTABLE BALANCE, WHICH WILL BE RESOLVED ONE WAY OR ANOTHER IN NEXT FEW WEEKS. THE POSITION ON THE KING IS INCREASINGLY CRITICAL IN THESE CIRCUMSTANCES, SO FAR HE HAS NOT GIVEN THE GREEN LIGHT TO ANY OF THE ACTIVISTS.  
WHITEHOUSE

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